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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RICE MEETS JAPAN'S AMBASSADOR TO IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador Rice, For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Rice on March 31 met with Akio Shiota, Japan's Ambassador to Iran, to hear Japan's assessment of U.S. outreach to Iran and Shiota's analysis of Iran's internal political situation. Shiota said President Obama's Nowruz message to the Iranians on March 19 gave Iranians hope, albeit vague, that relations with the U.S. would improve. He cautioned, however, that the Iranians and their government are busy preparing for national elections and therefore immediate outreach and dialogue could be postponed until the formation of a new government. Shiota assessed that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would likely win the presidential election in June. Ambassador Rice highlighted three key messages that the Japanese could reinforce with the Iranians: the U.S. goal of improving relations with Iran should be taken seriously by the Iranians; the P5 1 share the same goal with regard to Iran's nuclear program; and the U.S. expects the safe and swift return of American detainees, including Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador Rice on March 31 met with Akio Shiota, Japan's Ambassador to Iran, at the request of Japanese Permanent Representative to the UN, Yukio Takasu, to hear Japan's assessment of U.S. outreach to Iran and Shiota's analysis of Iran's internal political situation. Shiota said President Obama's Nowruz message to the Iranians on March 19 gave Iranians hope, albeit vague, that relations with the U.S. would improve. He cautioned, however, that the Iranians and their government are busy preparing for national elections and therefore immediate outreach and dialogue could be postponed until the formation of a new government. Shiota said President Obama's message to Iran was "smart" but being used by all political factions to their own advantage. Ambassador Rice said that perceived U.S. impatience with regard to Iran was based on the fact that the "clock is ticking" on its nuclear program and that each day that passes Iran is closer to completing its goals. She emphasized that the U.S. and its partners, including Japan, need to be prepared to tighten sanctions and national measures on Iran to show strong collective action in the event Iran fails to comply with its IAEA obligations.

13. (C) Shiota judged that the U.S. tends to concentrate on Iran's nuclear file at the expense of other issues, such as U.S.-Russian relations in the region and oil and natural gas supplies. He said other countries' relations with Iran were not defined by one issue. Ambassador Rice countered that the U.S. clearly views Iran in the context of broader issues, such as its influence in Afghanistan. She said Iran's presence at the Afghanistan conference in The Hague on March 31 demonstrates the U.S. assessment that Iranian issues are more complicated than its nuclear file. However, Ambassador Rice reiterated that the nuclear issue overwhelms all other factors.

14. (C) Shiota assessed that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would likely win the presidential election in

June unless conservative Tehran mayor Mohammad Ghalibaf entered the race in a serious way. He dismissed the reformist candidate Mousavi's campaign because it lacked sufficient support. On the economy, Shiota said its poor performance is affecting every Iranian and damaging the prospects of reformist candidates, although he did not explain why the reformists in particular were being undermined. He opined that economic sanctions were having little effect on Iran. Shiota defended Japan's implementation of Security Council resolutions and its own bilateral economic ties to Iran by saying that Japanese business had shrunk to a minimum in Iran.

15. (C) Ambassador Rice asked that Shiota underscore three key messages to the Iranian leadership. First, the U.S. effort at engagement is serious and the U.S. expects a serious response. Second, the P5 1 share the same goal vis-a-vis Iran's nuclear program and expect to see progress. The P5 1 is prepared to act collectively if Iran fails to comply with its IAEA obligations. Third, the U.S. is very concerned about the fate of American detainees, including Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi, who is currently being detained in Iran, and expect her safe and swift return. Shiota responded that Saberi's mother is Japanese and the GOJ takes this matter seriously.  
Rice